the private sector to engage in procurement of foodgrains. All controls on licensing, stock limits and movement restrictions on foodgrains have been removed by the Government vide a Central Order issued on 15-2-2002.

Purchase of Wheat by Private Traders

235. SHRI R. R GOENKA: Will the Minister of CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that a proposal has been formulated to allow private traders to purchase wheat at the Minimum Support Price (MSP) from the farmers instead of waiting for the FCI to disburse the stock;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the details of steps taken to ensure availability of strategic buffer stocks to provide for emergencies and to ensure stability of prices, as also against any unethical practices like private hoardings etc.?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION (SHRI V. SREENIVASA PRASAD): (a) and (b) As per present policy of the Government foodgrains trade is free in the country and there is no restriction on the private sector to engage in procurement of foodgrains.

(c) Keeping in view requirement of foodgrains allocated under Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS)/other Welfare Schemes, and to meet other emergent situations Government has fixed minimum buffer norms for stocks in the Central Pool.

Foodgrains for Mid-Day-Meal Scheme

236. SHRI MURLI DEORA: Will the Minister of CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION be pleased to state:

(a) whether FCI was required to supply wheat and rice under the Mid-day-Meal Scheme from August, 1995 and claim payment from Ministry of Human Resource Development by submitting the bills;

(b) whether FCI had instructed its various zones to submit the bills by seventh day of the following month so as to avoid interest on food credit payable to Banks;

(c) if so, the amount paid as interest on food credit by FCI from August, 1995 to October, 2003, zone-wise and year-wise; and